

Massachusetts Letters About Literature 2016
Massachusetts Center for the Book
www.massbook.org

Level II Honors Award

Dear Mr. Ben Carson,

I would first like to thank you for writing your autobiography *Gifted Hands*, for it has inspired me greatly. Because all of my family members have read your book and have thoroughly enjoyed it, I decided to read your book as well. Through reading your book, I have learned the significance of working hard in order to achieve greatness. Little did I know that my mindset and my character would be greatly influenced by your book *Gifted Hands*.

I have always been one of the smart students in school; however, I have often been made fun of because of my capabilities. Although being smart is an excellent trait, I used to find myself trying to hide it from my peers for fear that they would mock me. My parents always told me to simply ignore the other kids' comments because they were only jealous of me. I found it incredibly hard to believe that they were jealous because who wants to be a person who gets made fun of all the time?

Throughout my elementary school years, this thought used to haunt me. I just wanted to be an average student and not get such high grades. Therefore, I tried to be cautious that I did not show the other kids my graded papers because I did not want to seem like I was bragging. I also made sure to limit the amount of times that I went up to the front of the class to read my writing pieces, because I did not want everybody to think that my intentions were to show off my work. Even though my actions were exaggerated, I still could not help but think that being smart was "nerdy".

Blending in has always been a priority of mine since I was young. I never wanted to be in the spotlight, even if I deserved it. Some of my classmates would groan when they saw that I had gotten a good grade on a test. I kept feeling constant pressure on me to fulfill the role of being that kid who got good grades no matter what. I would feel like I was letting my classmates down if I ever received a grade that I was not used to getting. I knew that I had to stop putting so much pressure and stress on myself, but it was hard to put down the weight and move on.

Later, in middle school, I eventually grasped the concept that being smart is helpful. Even though I knew it deep down in my heart all along, I had the nagging feeling that being smart is dumb, but in reality, being smart is knowing what one is dumb about. There is always something new to learn about in our world. Therefore, one has to realize that the definition of "smart" is being aware of what one does not know, and taking the next step to learn about it.

This year in eighth grade, I read your book, *Gifted Hands*. Immediately after reading the first few chapters, I could genuinely relate to the situations that you experienced in school as a child. I have always had a dream of becoming an astronaut or an engineer ever since I was little, which is similar to your dream of becoming a doctor. Plus, I had similar eyesight issues as well!

Your book has influenced my way of thinking in many different ways. I no longer think of being smart as a burden, but rather as a gift from God. I thank God that he has given me my gifts and talents, and I pray that I will be able to use them to glorify Him to the best of my ability. Instead of trying to hide and burden myself with pressure, I enjoy being a leader when it comes to working in groups. I also like having the ability to help people when they are having trouble, which is similar to the time when you surged ahead of your peers in academics, ultimately leading to other kids asking for your help in math.

After I finished your book, I couldn't stop thinking about the many ways that I can continue to work hard in school and in other areas of my life. I strongly believe that other people my age will be greatly influenced by your book as well, and I do hope that others will take the time to read it. Your lessons on being a leader, working hard, and achieving success are very valuable, and I want to let you know that you have changed my life by writing this book.

Sincerely,

Julia K.

Julia K.
Upton
Grade 8